

Student Professional Development Group (SPDG)

Names of Attendees: Aakankshya Dhakal (Chair), Ujjwol Subedi (Vice Chair), Anna Acosta, Adejare Adegbuyi, Douglas Adjei Afrane, Adora Anthos, Charles Bency Appolon, Jyoti Aryal, Charles Bakin, Takiyah Ball, Cecil Barnett-Neefs, Shannon Bennett, Aditi Bhadauria, Swara Bhatt, Micah Black, Tejaswi Boyapati, Andrea Cerrato, Erdogan Ceylan, Ines Chambino, Ashley Chew, Bhaswati Chowdhury, Jillian Dalrymple, Andrew Armaan Das, SWETA DEB, Yihong Deng, Brenna DeRocili, Darin Detwiler, Prantho Malakar Dipta, Monijesu Fadamiro, Amanda Fernandes, Diego Fredes-García, Julia Fukuba, Alexandra Garlick, Jaber Ghorbani, Fanny Gozzi, Anushuya Guragain, Kailyn Hanke, Vannith Hay, Yihan He, Indu Aashritha Idumalla, Mitchel Jackson, Sheetal Jha, Carris Yatong Jiang, April Jimenez Artavia, Johana Lilian John Muthiah, Leonie Kemmerling, Pawan Khanal, Karuna Kharel, Kham Khatri, Arshpreet Kaur Khattra, Maria Klobongona, Veera Venkata Praveen Kosuri, Daniel Leiva, Ingrid Lima, Ivannova Lituma, Stefhanie Loaiza, Christian Lorenzo, Deb Madhuparna, Ly Mai, Gary Maloncon, Ngozi Manukaji, Marlee Mims, Tomas Moita, Diana Mora-Lee, David Mugabo, Ramin Nemati, Yhuliana Nino Fuerte, Mmaduabuchi Okeh, Andrew Stiven Ortiz Balsero, Sipei Ouyang, Akenio Patterson, Narindra Randriamiarintsoa, Dheeraj Reddy, Marco Reina, Kayla Rivera, Suyapa Rojas, Luis Salazar, Hilal Samut, Nirmal Thirunavookarasu Sankaranarayanan, Neelam Sharma, Manan Sharma, Dikshya Shilpakar, Pratiksha Shrestha, Katherine Sierra, Esmeralda Soto-Velez, Catarina Sousa, Lauryn Strong, Kassim Sulleyman, VIANCA TASHIGUANO, Helen Taylor, Anjana Thankachan, Janiah Thomas, Bonnie Waldemarson, Yiqing Wang, Tom Weaver, IRIT WEISER, Meri Beth Wojtaszek, Katherine Woo, Tongzhou Xu, Jeffrey Xue, Caroline Yates, Nuradeen Yusuf, Alejandro Zelaya Menjivar

Total Number of Attendees: 102.

Meeting Called to Order: July 26th, 11:00 A.M.

Minutes Recording Secretary: Sweta Deb.

Old Business:

Sheetal Jha called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees, followed by a review of the IAFP Antitrust Guidelines. The 2025-2026 Executive Board (Sheetal Jha, Chair; Aakankshya Dhakal, Vice-Chair; Andrea Cerrato, Secretary; Arshpreet Kaur, Treasurer; Stefhanie Loaiza, Networking Coordinator; Julia Fukuba, International Affiliate Representative) was introduced and thanked, along with the 14 candidates who ran for the Board and the 31 members who

voted in this year's election. The SPDG mission statement and goals were reviewed: to provide students of food safety with a platform to enrich their IAFP membership experience by facilitating peer networking, serving as a resource for employers seeking qualified applicants, encouraging exchange of information on protecting the food supply, maintaining high student membership, and serving and adapting to student interests and needs.

The group reviewed how to join IAFP Connect and the Student PDG through the Member Dashboard, and how to sign up for IAFP volunteer opportunities (mentoring, committees, and annual meeting roles). Members were encouraged to connect with SPDG on LinkedIn, Instagram (@iafpdpg), and GroupMe, and to consider enrolling in the IAFP Mentor Match Program, which pairs students with a food safety professional mentor for at least monthly communication. A year-in-review recap covered the "Meet Your Favorite Scientist" virtual speaker series (featuring Dr. Joshua Gurtler, Dr. Julian Cox, Dr. Angela Anandappa, Dr. Matthew Moore, and Dr. Byron Chaves), three Virtual Coffee Hour sessions (finding your path in academia, interacting with the executive board, and connecting affiliates and students), the T-shirt design competition (14 submissions, 51 votes), the 3-Minute Thesis competition (19 video submissions narrowed to 5 finalists), the Food Safety Flash competition (13 flyer submissions narrowed to 9 finalists), and quarterly SPDG newsletters. Recipients of the Student Travel Scholarship were congratulated, and several Student Spotlight members were recognized. The Board reported raising over \$14,500 during 2025-2026 to fund the Student Luncheon, Luncheon Trivia, the Student Mixer, and virtual event prizes, and thanked this year's donors: Ecolab, American Institute of Banking, Phi Tau Sigma, Vikan, R&F Products, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. The previous year's meeting minutes were approved.

New Business:

The incoming 2026-2027 Executive Board (Aakankshya Dhakal, Chair; Ujjwol Subedi, Vice-Chair; Sweta Deb, Secretary; Jaber Ghorbani, Treasurer; Madhuparna Deb, Networking Coordinator; Daniel Leiva, International Affiliate Representative) was then introduced. The group reviewed the student-sponsored and co-sponsored sessions being offered at IAFP 2026: Roundtable RT16, "How LGBTQIA+ Food Safety Professionals Can Thrive During Less-Affirming Times" (Monday, July 27, Room 208), and Symposium S47, "Advancing AI in Food Safety Through Student Competition on Benchmark Datasets" (Wednesday, July 29, Room 203-205). Members were reminded of SPDG events taking place during the conference,

including the Business Meeting, Student Luncheon, Student Mixer, and Student Booth (where members can meet Board members and take photos), and were encouraged to get involved with their local IAFP Affiliate — IAFP currently has 59 Affiliates worldwide — and to join the SPDG LinkedIn group to share highlights and see Affiliate events; questions on Affiliates can be directed to incoming officer Daniel Leiva or outgoing officer Julia Fukuba. The upcoming FoodMed 2026 Affiliate event (Hong Kong, November 5-6, 2026) was also highlighted.

Appreciation was extended to student volunteers who signed up to monitor sessions and poster set-up, with reminders to arrive early to the Speaker Ready Room and pick up vests and materials. The Board asked members to submit recommendations for the 2027 “Meet Your Favorite Scientist” speaker series and reviewed the formats and requirements for future Symposium, Roundtable, and Webinar proposals, noting key upcoming deadlines: the IAFP 2027 Call for Symposium, Roundtable, and Workshop Proposals closes September 30, 2026, and the IAFP 2027 Call for Abstracts (Technical/Poster) closes January 12, 2027 (Student Travel Scholarship deadline TBA).

The Board also promoted the AI Benchmarking Competition ahead of its second year in 2027, citing this year's results (30+ teams, sponsored travel for top teams, and a dedicated symposium at IAFP 2026) and benefits for 2027 participants, including the opportunity to present at IAFP, guaranteed co-authorship on a working challenge paper for finalists, travel support for top teams, hands-on team-based machine learning work with real food-safety data, expert mentorship, and a leaderboard; interested students were directed to scan a QR code to join the 2027 interest list or contact Luke Qian. The Board closed by presenting its 2026-2027 vision — to build a welcoming community, help students form a strong professional network, connect students with professionals in the field, and organize activities that build professional skills, including the Student Luncheon and Mixer, student session monitoring, Virtual Coffee and Social Hours, the 3-Minute Thesis competition, the Food Safety Flash competition, the 2026- 2027 “Meet Your Favorite Food Scientist” series, and the AI Benchmarking Competition on Predictive Food Safety Models — and announced that IAFP 2027 will be held in Kansas City, Missouri, July 18-21, 2027.

Discussion during New Business centered on career development opportunities for students. Suggestions and comments received from students and participants are listed below:-

- Yusuf (PhD student) suggested some webinar topics revolving around early-career PhD comparing industry versus academia and career pathways; however, the board noted that this topic was previously covered in an SPDG webinar.

- Razia (PhD, University of Florida) noted that it will be helpful if students were connected to

professors for post doc/PhD opportunities. The board commented that the mentor-mentee match program is already in place to help students guide their career moves and also suggested that attendees add that industry and government also offer postdoctoral opportunities that the board can try featuring upcoming postdoc/PhD opportunities in future newsletters.

-Gopinath (PhD, University of Georgia) suggested organizing a virtual career fair for students, one-on-one conversations with industry, and coordinating with companies that are actively hiring, and recommended increasing the number of travel scholarships available. Other attendees emphasized that one-on-one conversations at the annual meeting are valuable for early-career scientists seeking jobs, that the process can be more difficult for non-U.S. citizens navigating online applications, that in-person interaction carries particular weight with employers, and that students should take advantage of mentorship conversations. Sheetal encouraged members to attend virtual coffee chats and other social events, and another PhD student from the University of Florida suggested featuring students in newsletters and highlighting social and figure-illustration tools students can use, noting that such features could also help attract company sponsorship.

Recommendations to the Executive Board:

1. Approve the 2026-2027 SPDG Executive Board as elected: Aakankshya Dhakal (Chair), Ujjwol Subedi (Vice-Chair), Sweta Deb (Secretary), Jaber Ghorbani (Treasurer), Madhuparna Deb (Networking Coordinator), and Daniel Leiva (International Affiliate Representative).

Next Meeting Date: Sunday, July 18-21, 2027, Kansas City, MO.

Meeting Adjourned: July 26th 12:00 P.M.

Chairperson Name: Aakankshya Dhaka.